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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 RIYADH 001906

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SU](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: SAG SUPPORT FOR MINNAWI APPEARS LIMITED TO
DOMESTIC CRACKDOWNS

REF: A. KHARTOUM 1133

[1](#)B. KHARTOUM 1386

[1](#)C. RIYADH 1375

Classified By: Deputy-Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY: The Saudi Arabian Government has increased its African peace-making profile by calling for a peaceful resolution to the conflicts in western Sudan; however, SAG officials, some foreign diplomats in Riyadh, and members of the Kingdom's Sudanese diaspora express considerable doubt about sustained SAG engagement. While Senior Assistant to the Sudanese President and Sudan Liberation Movement leader Minni Minnawi may be optimistic about his coveted July 2007 one-on-one conversation with King Abdullah (reftels A and B), it is unlikely that the meeting will translate into the SAG's commitment of greater energies towards resolving the Darfur crisis. However, the renewed Saudi-Sudan relationship appears to be resulting in an ongoing crackdown on Sudanese opposition groups within the Kingdom, often overtly tied to the groups' real or perceived anti-Sudanese Government/anti-Minnawi tendencies. END SUMMARY.

Increased African Peacemaking Profile?

[1](#)2. (S) The Saudi Government increased its African peacemaking profile in 2007 through its efforts with the Government of Sudan (GOS) to help resolve the ongoing conflicts in the Darfur region of western Sudan. On the sidelines of the March 28 Arab League Summit, King Abdullah met with GOS President Omar Al Bashir, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, Arab League Secretary General Amr Mousa, and African Union Chairman Alpha Oumar Konare to discuss the troubled Darfur region. The Saudis then hosted a peace conference on May 1, during which the Presidents of Sudan and Chad signed a peace agreement to work together to prevent the spillover of violence from Chad into Darfur and prevent opposition groups from staging cross-border attacks. Special Assistant to the Sudanese President and Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) leader Minni Minnawi met with King Abdullah, Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal, and Interior Minister Prince Nayif bin Abdul Aziz on July 19. Subsequently, the SAG hosted Sudanese Defense Minister Abdulrahim Hussein on July 21, after a reciprocal May visit by Interior Minister Prince Nayif. In addition, Sudanese Parliament House Speaker Ahmed Ibrahim Al-Tahir visited Jeddah on August 26 to meet with SAG officials to promote the bilateral relationship.

13. (C) Ambassador Saleh Al-Kuhaimi, MFA's Director of the Arab States Department, told PolOff on July 29 that the Saudis consider Sudan and Somalia to be "the depth of the (Arabian) Peninsula." Regarding Saudi support to Sudan, he noted the SAG's sponsorship of a field hospital along the Sudan/Chad border and food aid, as well as encouragement of UN troop deployment "to bring lasting peace." He repeatedly cited the importance of respecting all parties, not taking sides, and respecting the sovereignty of other countries.

SAG Engagement Questioned

14. (C) On the surface, the Saudis appear to be taking a more active role in Sudan's peace-making efforts. However, Saudis, some foreign diplomats in Riyadh, and the Sudanese diaspora question sustained SAG engagement. Dr. Suliman Al-Turki (strictly protect), economic advisor to the Minister of Finance, told PolOff on August 28 that he could only find evidence of the widely-reported USD 20 million SAG donation and in-kind donations from the Saudi Red Crescent Society to the survivors of the recent floods in Sudan. He could not find any other documents from the MFA or Royal Diwan instructing the Ministry of Finance to commit funds towards the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM), Transitional Darfur Regional Authority, or other humanitarian efforts for Darfur. He noted ruefully that there "may be other ways and means of channeling money."

15. (C) Minnawi expressed optimism regarding his 40-minute meeting with King Abdullah (reftels A and B), presuming that the King was seriously committed to Darfur. However, Samir Anabtawi, long-time Education Advisor to Prince Waleed bin Talal, told PolOff on September 6 that the amount of time

RIYADH 00001906 002 OF 003

that the King spends with visitors is not proportionate to their importance. He pointed out that sometimes the King is in a "chatty" mood and lingers with his guests, but this does not necessarily reflect his personal interests. In fact, Anabtawi remarked that the Saudi leadership considers Africa to be a "box of worms" and that their only likely engagement with Sudan would be financial. He added that many Sudanese work in the Royal Diwan, because the Saudis consider them to be docile, loyal servants -- but not worthy of more significant leadership positions.

16. (C) Ahmed Al-Ansari, acting Political Counselor at the Egyptian Embassy, told PolOff on August 26 that he doubted the SAG would be active on Darfur because "Saudis don't like to fail in public." He also heard from Sudanese officials that the Sudanese do not trust the SAG to engage in Darfur's peacemaking efforts for three reasons -- first the Sudanese do not perceive the Saudis to be seriously committed to the deep-rooted, ongoing Darfur crisis, which began years ago, when SAG engagement only began in 2007. Second, the Sudanese would prefer that a donor nation that is truly invested in the outcome of the peace talks take a greater role. Third, he said that the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) is comprised mainly of members of the Zaghawa tribe and backed by Libyans, who will not allow the SAG to be more active.

17. (S) French Embassy First Counselor Emmanuel Bonne also expressed doubt of greater SAG support to Minnawi or Darfur in general during an August 26 meeting with PolOff. After the stalled efforts to reconcile Hamas and Fatah, Bonne surmised that the Saudis were most likely to work within Arab League channels to encourage a peaceful resolution to Sudan's conflicts. He recalled a conversation with an aide to National Security Advisor Prince Bandar Bin Sultan, who emphasized that Saudi interest in East Africa was rooted principally in counterterrorism; therefore, Somalia took precedence over Sudan. In addition, Bonne mentioned that the Saudis did not even raise the issue of Darfur during their official visit to Paris in June 2007. (ref C) He added that

the French Foreign Minister prepared a special briefing on Sudan for the Saudis. However, in response, Foreign Minister Al-Faisal only commented on the importance of "respecting the sovereignty of Sudan."

¶8. (S) Members of the Sudanese diaspora also expressed significant doubts to PolOff during a series of meetings in June, July, and August about Saudi support to Darfur -- and of Minnawi in particular. SLM members Mohammed Halla and Annur Jibreel (strictly protect) questioned why Minnawi visited Saudi Arabia, which is the "largest source of funding" by Darfurian expatriates for Darfur, over one year after the May 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement signing ceremony. They presumed that the SAG had not permitted an earlier visit. In addition, Halla told PolOff that the few SLM members who supported Minnawi had moved back to Khartoum in 2006, while the majority of remaining Darfurians in the Kingdom did not support Minnawi. In fact, Minnawi had asked the Darfurian community in Riyadh and Jeddah several times to meet with him in July, but they refused.

SAG Cracks Down on Sudanese Activists

¶9. (S) Halla and Jibreel confided that the only possible indication of Saudi support to Minnawi was the recent summer 2007 crackdown on their political activism. Mabath (Saudi security service) began rounding up Sudanese based in Riyadh on July 2 and questioned them on their activities against the GOS. Over the course of several weeks, 12 Sudanese were questioned at the Ministry of Interior (MOI), forced to sign a statement that they would not engage in political activities, and released; nine were from Darfur.

¶10. (S) Many Darfurians were surprised by the MOI incidents, citing their many years of freedom of association and political organizing with the SAG's tacit approval. Halla noted that when the GOS sided with Saddam Hussein, the SAG at first tried to expel the Sudanese diaspora. However, 30 community leaders went to Riyadh Governor Prince Salman in 1991, expressed their dissatisfaction with the Sudanese Government, and promised to not cross the "red lines of Saudi domestic politics, religious ideas, communism, and the Muslim Brotherhood." Shortly thereafter, Prince Salman and a Prince Ahmed, whom Halla described as an MOI deputy minister, took responsibility for the Sudanese community and quietly began

RIYADH 00001906 003 OF 003

supporting their opposition activities. (NOTE: Halla may be referring to Prince Ahmed bin Abdul Aziz, an MOI vice-minister, one of the few, remaining sons of King Abdul Aziz. END NOTE.) Halla said the SAG approved the use of hotel exhibition rooms and istirahat (country rest homes) for public lectures (including a 2006 address by former GOS Prime Minister Sadiq Al-Mahdi), political meetings, and cultural events. He added that the "wife of the vice-governor of Riyadh" sponsored a festival hall for a 2006 Darfurian event.

Halla speculated that the summer crackdown resulted from tensions between Minister of Interior Prince Nayif and Prince Salman.

¶11. (S) Sudanese activists from the northern Nubia region confided that the SAG began cracking down on their political activism as well. Ashraf Badri, Faisal Abdul Aziz Amin, and Adil Saeed Osman (strictly protect) told PolOff on August 23 that some Nubians were "investigated" in April 2006, but the real troubles began this summer. They said that 150 Mabath and regular police officers surrounded 25 Nubians attending a July 12 community meeting at a Jeddah istirahat. The Nubians claimed that they were fundraising for the four Nubians killed and 13 injured at a June 13 demonstration by the proposed Khajbar dam in Nubia. However, the Mabath did not interrogate them about their Nubian activism; instead, they asked them over the course of three days if they were "an anti-Minni group" and if they were planning to engage in

terrorist activities. Ashraf argued that this raid was orchestrated by the GOS and tied to the then rumored visit of Minnawi to Jeddah. He offered as evidence that "Shazeri," a Sudanese Consulate official, called his relatives on the morning of the raid to warn them that the Saudi police were coming. Then they advised other Nubians not to attend the meeting, but they "took the risk." Ashraf speculated that when Prince Nayif visited Khartoum in spring 2007, the GOS handed over suspected Saudi terrorists to him. In return, Ashraf believes that Prince Nayif promised to crack down on Sudanese opposition groups.

¶12. (S) COMMENT: Despite the King,s one-on-one meeting with Minni Minnawi, it is unlikely that the SAG will engage deeply in the Darfur peace process by exerting its leverage on the GOS and Darfur rebel groups. Most contacts agree that SAG involvement has been limited to symbolic gestures and humanitarian endeavors. Even the May meeting with the Sudanese and Chadian presidents was largely viewed as a symbolic retort to Libyan leader Muammar Qadaffi, who hosted a similar conference in February 2007 in Tripoli. It remains to be seen how the SAG will follow up on the October 27 Libya summit, but it is likely that any future SAG engagement will flow through Arab League channels. The only recent change in SAG-GOS relations appears to be this summer's crackdown on various Sudanese opposition groups -- tied to their real and perceived anti-GOS/anti-Minnawi activities. U.S. encouragement of a greater SAG role in resolving Darfur's conflicts may yield limited, temporary results. However, sustained SAG engagement is not likely, as the SAG remains focused on the regional crises in Palestine, Iraq, and Lebanon. END COMMENT.
FRAKER